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SUBJECT: TOWARD THE CONCLAVE PART II: CHALLENGES FACING THE CHURCH

REF: VATICAN 000463

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SUMMARY  
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1. (U) When the 115 Cardinal Electors come together in the Sistine Chapel April 18 to elect a new Pope, they will vote to elect the individual they believe is best suited to lead the Catholic Church at this moment in history. Who that person is will depend in part on what the Cardinal electors believe are the greatest challenges facing the Church today. This message, the second in a three part series looking ahead to the conclave, examines the issues that are likely to shape the selection of the next pope. These include reversing the dramatic decline of religious observance in traditionally Catholic European countries, managing the rapid growth of the Church in Africa, meeting the challenge of evangelical groups in Latin America, the Church's approach to bioethics, dialogue with other religions -- particularly with the Muslim world, promoting unity with the Orthodox Church, expanding vocations, improving training of new priests, and managing the Holy See's broader interaction with the world. The latter issue will be particularly important to the U.S. as we look to build on the foundation of shared interests developed with the Holy See under the Pontificate of John Paul II in promoting human dignity through religious freedom, human rights, democracy and freedom. End Summary.

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF A GLOBAL CHURCH  
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2. (U) Whoever is elected pope will need to work hard to keep the multi-hued worldwide tapestry of the Catholic Church from unraveling into geographical, theological or ideological strands. When the 115 cardinals who have gathered to elect the next pope speak about the problems facing the Church, they sometimes appear to be speaking about different churches. Latin Americans rarely mention Europe's problem of empty pews, while sexual abuse scandals rank low among priorities in Asia. Each cardinal will bring his own concerns and priorities into the conclave, but the man who leaves as pope must have a global vision capable of addressing these diverse and distinctive challenges if he is to be a successful pastor to a flock of some one billion Catholics. John Paul II grasped the universal qualities of his mission, and succeeded in conveying to the faithful on every continent his interest in each region's concerns. His successor will need to adopt a similar strategy in meeting the priority challenges faced in Europe, the Americas, and Asia.

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EUROPE: REVERSING THE DECLINE  
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3. (U) The decline of Catholic observance and identification in the developed world, particularly in traditionally Catholic countries in Western Europe, cannot go unheeded by the next pope. Thus the cardinal electors will be seeking a candidate who understands this crisis of faith and whom they believe can help reverse it. This does not necessarily translate into a European Pope, since the decline has occurred while Europeans have held the papacy. Nevertheless, some European papal contenders, including Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, have made clear that they regard reinvigorating the European church as their highest priority. Another line of thinking among Cardinals suggests that the Church should accept a diminished status in Europe, and focus instead on strengthening the "faithful remnant" of European believers for a future. Many of these remnants in Europe today can be found in lay religious movements such as Communion and Liberation, Opus Dei, and the Focolari, and a candidate with close ties to these groups such as Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi of Milan or Cardinal Angelo Scola of Venice could benefit if such a view finds a wide following.

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AFRICA: MANAGING GROWTH, FIGHTING POVERTY  
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4. (U) In 1900 Africa had less than one percent of the world's

Catholics; today the total has risen to 13 percent and should climb to almost 20 percent by 2025. The next Pope will see in the African churches a hope for the Church's future, not only in terms of numbers of believers and degree of religiosity, but

also as a rich source for the priests and other religious personnel now seriously lacking in the West. In fact, the principal problem facing African bishops today is how to manage this exponential growth and meet the pastoral needs of a poor and disadvantaged flock. The Pope will also need to address pressures from this growing flock for greater cultural adaptations of traditional Catholic liturgies that are resisted by conservative elements in the Roman Curia.

15. (U) The next Pope will also have to lead the Holy See's efforts to address the political, economic, and social challenges in Africa. He will be expected to promote creative ways to address the lowest per capita income of any continent, millions of AIDS victims, millions of refugees and further millions of internally displaced persons, and an external debt that makes development impossible for many nations. Already the Holy See provides over 25 percent of care and treatment for HIV/AIDS patients, and its hospitals and clinics provide critical support for African populations. Pope John Paul II left a strong legacy of concern for the continent, reflected in his call just prior to his death for another special meeting of the Synod of Bishops to focus on Africa and his late 2004 invitation to his Nuncios in Africa to meet in Rome to assess how the Church in Africa could help meet the continent's challenges of poverty, mismanagement of resources, corruption, political instability and social disorientation. The Holy See will therefore be seeking the leadership of a pope who will be able to serve as a voice for the powerless, a mediator of conflicts, and a strong pastor to guide the growing African flock.

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LATIN AMERICA: CATHOLIC BASTION UNDER PRESSURE  
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16. (U) Forty-two percent of the world's Catholics live in Latin America, and the continent was a prime focus during John Paul II's pontificate. He made 18 pastoral trips to the region, bringing the papacy directly to the people in a way that they had not previously experienced. John Paul II also re-shaped the hierarchy in Latin America, appointing bishops and cardinals who rejected liberation theology but reflected his criticisms of free-market capitalism and supported traditional family and sexual values. As a result, the bishops today are in tune with the church's position on priestly celibacy, abortion and other moral issues, while also being committed to social justice and teaching the social doctrine of the church in favor of the poor and oppressed.

17. (U) The electors will be looking for a new Pope who can continue to strike this balance between moral conservatism and social activism, while providing a vibrant and direct pastoral presence in the region of the world with the most Catholics. This will be particularly vital to the Church's ability to meet the strong challenge of Pentecostal Protestantism that has drawn away millions of Catholics from the fold. In the face of this growth, John Paul II's successor will need to be flexible in allowing the Church in Latin America to meet its needs creatively. For example, he will likely have to continue John Paul II's tacit approval of female leadership in the Latin American church (many parishes are administered by nuns or lay women who baptize, bury the dead and lead prayer services in the absence of ordained clergy). And, while the next pope will not change the Church's discipline about clerical celibacy, he could be expected to allow for an expanded role for lay people that will go some way to countering the challenge from the evangelicals who tend to be more inclusive in their hierarchical structure.

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ASIA: THE NEW FRONTIER  
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18. (SBU) Asia remains the last frontier for the Catholic Church's missionary efforts. With the Philippines being the sole Catholic country in the region, the rest of Asia looks to many to be ripe for Catholic evangelization. South Korea, for example, has witnessed spectacular Catholic growth in recent years. Elsewhere in Asia, the Holy See has taken a low key approach to missionary activity over the past 20 years that has left church personnel and members relatively unscathed by government crackdowns, but has also impeded real growth for the Church in the region. The electors will therefore want the next Pope to give a push to his missionary department in countries

like India, Indonesia and China, hoping that the successes of the Church in South Korea can be repeated. The next pope will also be charged with healing the diplomatic impasse with China in order to expand the Church's presence there. An Asian pope, perhaps someone like Bombay's Cardinal Ivan Dias, would ensure

that the Asian frontier is crossed with greater missionary fervor.

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STANDING FIRM AGAINST SECULARISM  
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19. (SBU) In face of increasing secularism and what many in the Church regard as anti-clericalism and anti-Catholicism, the College of Cardinals will be looking for a Pope they believe will stand firm against these pressures and staunchly defend the Church's beliefs against abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, same-sex marriage, and on behalf of a "culture of life" and traditional family values. John Paul II placed these issues at the front and center of his papacy, and the Cardinal electors he picked almost universally share his views on these issues. His successor will be expected to continue high-profile celebrations of the family on the various continents, and to press governments for legislation to support family stability and development. Cardinals who have publicly, passionately, and effectively advocated these core beliefs -- including Cardinal Hummes of Brazil, Norbert Rivera of Mexico, and Scola of Venice -- will almost certainly gain favor among the electors.

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SHAPING THE FRONTIERS OF BIOETHICS  
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10. (SBU) The Vatican's unusual public criticism of the handling of the Terri Schiavo case in Florida offers an indication of how many Cardinals might want the next pope to deal with issues of bioethics. John Paul II spoke out often and forcefully about what he termed the "culture of death" that was overtaking the Western world in particular, and the cardinal electors will be looking for someone capable of taking on the powerful social, economic and moral forces at play as science presses the frontiers of eugenics, stem cell research, and human cloning. In this regard, Milan's Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, who was responsible for ghostwriting much of Pope John Paul II's work on bioethics, could win some votes. Among the papabile, Tettamanzi has developed considerable expertise in issues relating to euthanasia and the care of the aged and dying. The next pope will be expected to offer a strong voice to prick the conscience of a world in need of moral direction on these difficult scientific and ethical questions.

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INTER-RELIGIOUS AND ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE  
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11. (SBU) Shaping the Holy See's relations with Islam is almost certain to be a central challenge for the next Pope, as Catholic communities are increasingly coexisting closely with Muslim communities in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Pope John Paul II worked hard to build a dialogue with the Muslim world, becoming the first Pope to visit a mosque, address Muslim youth, and invite Imams to join him in a World Day of Peace in Assisi. He succeeded in building bridges that helped convince many in the Muslim world that a clash of civilizations was not inevitable, and that Christianity and Islam could coexist with mutual respect for differences. At the same time, the Holy See's Council for Inter-religious Dialogue languished in the latter years of John Paul II's pontificate, as the Holy See found it difficult to expand the dialogue beyond a few moderate Islamic voices. Some Vatican officials have also begun to advocate a harder, less compromising line to press for religious freedom for Christians in Muslim countries. A Pope with knowledge of the Islamic world and its challenges to Christianity could therefore be attractive to the electors. This would tend to augur for a candidate from Africa or Europe with experience of Islam and a demonstrated ability to reach out to different religious communities while defending Catholic beliefs, such as Cardinal Arinze of Nigeria or Cardinal Scola of Venice.

12. (SBU) Dialogue with other Christian churches, in particular the Orthodox Church, will be a priority for the next papacy. Relations with the Greek Orthodox have been marked by slow but steady progress. By contrast, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II, who was always suspicious of his fellow Slav

John Paul II, is already calling for more "tact" from the next pope to remove the obstacles that separate the two churches. It will take a man of considerable ecumenical skill to mend the fences with Russian Orthodoxy -- one of John Paul II's great unfinished projects -- at least until Alexy II himself passes from the scene. The next pope will have to decide either to compromise and accommodate a petulant Russian Orthodoxy, or push back at the risk of putting off prospects for close cooperation to another papacy. There are advocates of both views among the Cardinals. Likewise, the dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians, Anglicans in particular, will be on the new Pope's agenda, but differences between Catholicism and mainline Protestantism are too great to be resolved even in the distant future. The focus will more likely be on areas such as social justice and development issues where views are closer than in the theological realm.

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MANAGING THE CHURCH  
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13. (SBU) One of the most frequent criticisms of Pope John Paul II was that he neglected the Church's internal management, leaving the Curia to run itself while he traveled the world as evangelizer-in-chief. As a result, many of the non-Curial cardinal electors will be looking for a pope who will take a more hands-on approach and rein in the Curia's propensity to make decisions in Rome when they could just as well be made at the national or diocesan level. The next pope will not want to hear the lament from bishops that "we are treated by Rome like glorified altar boys" heard by John Paul II during one difficult meeting during his pontificate. Although officials in the Curia counter that the Church is already decentralized, with archdioceses acting with independent authority on most matters, calls for greater participation in shaping church decisions from the pews to the bishops have been persistent, and the next Pope will need to address this desire for greater involvement. This is especially so because of the geographically distinct challenges the church faces and the need to respond with regionally tailored strategies.

14. (SBU) Leadership roles for lay people and for women in particular will also be high on the next pope's agenda. Some modest steps were made during John Paul II's papacy (including promoting women to senior Vatican positions), but the new pontificate will want to ensure these are not seen as tokenism but rather as a genuine attempt to achieve the inclusiveness enshrined in the official teachings of the Church. A Pope with creative ideas for deepening lay engagement and expanding the role of women in the church, would appeal to many -- though certainly not all -- electors.

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INTERACTING WITH THE WORLD  
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15. (SBU) The Holy See under John Paul II has greatly expanded its international engagement, now maintaining diplomatic relations with 174 countries. It plays an active role in international debates such as the war in Iraq, terrorism, ethnic and regional conflicts, and human cloning. Papal travel has also contributed to the Holy See's international influence, as the Pope has brought his message of peace, reconciliation, freedom, and respect for human rights and religious freedom directly and dramatically to countries even without large Catholic populations. The Cardinal electors will certainly want to build on this foundation and maintain the Holy See's position as a moral voice on the international scene. For example, in the face of continued terrorist threats, the next Pope will be expected to speak out forcefully to denounce the abuse of religion to justify terrorist violence. He will be expected to be active in pressing for peace in the Middle East and protecting Catholic interests in the Holy Lands. And, he will be expected actively to promote the Holy See's vision of the centrality of the human person and his or her dignity.

16. (SBU) Given this prominent international role as the Holy See's chief diplomat, the Cardinal electors will be seeking a Pope who will be comfortable engaging world leaders and who will be able to cultivate effective diplomatic partnerships within the international community. He must be able to project the Holy See's views on the international public stage, forcefully opposing oppression and poverty, promoting religious tolerance and freedom, and building respect for human dignity.

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COMMENT  
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17. (SBU) No matter who is elected Pope in the days ahead, the U.S. and Holy See will continue to share common interests in promoting human dignity, freedom, democracy, and sustainable development, breaking down religious and cultural divisions, and standing up for the disadvantaged and oppressed. The new Pope will inevitably bring a new style and temperament to the papacy, and will bring to bear a different set of historical and cultural experiences that will shape his world view and attitude toward the U.S. We should reach out early in the new pontificate with a high level visit that can begin to shape a common agenda on the issues where we share similar goals, particularly in promoting democracy and religious freedom, overcoming terror, advancing the Middle East peace process, stabilizing Iraq, and meeting humanitarian and developmental challenges.

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